

American

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Secretary Clinton Appeals to South African Students to Partner with U.S.

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 09 August 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told South African students that their country and the United States share a joint calling to strengthen human rights and other values in Africa and elsewhere.

“We have a deep and abiding connection,” Clinton said at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa, August 8. “Like you, we are compelled by the arc of our nation’s history to stand up around the world for the values we ascribe to and advance at home. ... We have to look beyond our borders.”

Clinton said Africa will not reach its full potential until African countries break down trade barriers with their neighbors.

“That’s why the Obama administration remains committed to renewing the African Growth and Opportunity Act [AGOA] with South Africa included before the act expires in 2015. We’re pleased that Congress acted last week to extend the Third-Country Fabric Provision through 2015, which will have enormous benefits for entrepreneurs, especially women, in many of South Africa’s neighbors,” Clinton said. AGOA widens access to the U.S. market for African countries that bring their economic practices into line with international standards.

Clinton praised South African President Jacob Zuma for “championing” an African initiative for governments, the private sector and regional organizations to build a highway from Cape Town to Cairo. “With South Africa in the lead, perhaps I will be able to come back in a few years and actually drive it,” she said.

Clinton said South Africa made a huge contribution to global security by becoming the first country to voluntarily renounce nuclear weapons. “This means South Africa can play an even greater role on issues like curbing Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons,” she said.

Highlighting another facet of the broad partnership, the secretary noted that U.S. agricultural scientists are collaborating with colleagues at the University of Pretoria to develop food strategies for the continent. Farmers in Malawi notably are benefiting from the partnership by learning to use their land more efficiently and raise their incomes, she said.

“This is the kind of partnership we want to see more of, not just with South Africa but with other African countries that are becoming donors as well as recipients

of assistance. Tanzania and Ghana, for example, are improving food security throughout East and West Africa. Nigeria has released supplies to help its neighbors in the Sahel,” she said.

In the realm of human rights, South Africa is providing guidance to Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Kyrgyzstan on making a democratic transition. In South Africa, “you can point to independent trade unions that stood up for workers’ rights and the civil society groups that provided legal counsel and other essential support. You can point to the courageous journalists who insisted on telling the truth even when it invited the government’s wrath,” Clinton said. In South Sudan, the United States and South Africa are partnering to train judges and strengthen the judicial system there.

Clinton told the Western Cape students that South African youth will play a key role in shaping the future.

“This world demands the qualities of youth — not a time of life but a state of mind, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity,” she said, quoting Robert F. Kennedy, a former U.S. senator and attorney general. She urged the students to carry forward the legacy of Nelson Mandela, who used truth and reconciliation to lead South Africa to a new era.

“It’s a burden being an American or a South African, because people expect you to really live up to those standards,” Clinton said. “Let us work together so that the values that shaped both our nations may also shape a world that is more peaceful, more prosperous and more just.”

U.S., Trans-Pacific Partners Move Toward Concluding Trade Deal

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 09 August 2012

Washington — The United States and its fellow Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) members are making significant progress toward concluding a comprehensive trade deal set to boost economies and create jobs throughout the Asia-Pacific region, according to Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Demetrios Marantis.

“We’ve got a lot more work to do, but with the momentum that we’ve had and with the single-minded purpose that the nine TPP countries have approached the negotiations so far, I’m very confident that we are on track to realizing the dream of the TPP, which is concluding a high-standard, 21st-century agreement that serves as the platform for regional integration in the Asia-Pacific,” Marantis said August 8 in remarks at the Wilson Center in Washington.

He said that since the United States joined partnership

talks in November 2009, the group has made remarkable progress in negotiating an agreement that aims to support new jobs, strengthen regional relations and eventually create a free-trade area. Marantis commended the deal for also setting modern trade standards, including ensuring worker rights and protecting the environment.

Heading into the 14th round of negotiations, to be held September 6–15 in Leesburg, Virginia, the partners are focusing on a number of key themes. They are developing an ambitious and comprehensive agreement that covers not only goods, but also traditional and emerging services. Marantis said the group is working to address nontariff barriers to trade by promoting regulatory coherence.

The partnership also aims to better integrate small- and medium-sized enterprises into global trade. Calling these businesses “the backbone of our economy,” the primary source of jobs in the United States and the largest group of U.S. exporters, Marantis said their participation in the regional trade agreement will add significant value for all partners.

He said the group is working to address not only existing issues, but also emerging ones. Partners are negotiating disciplines that will help to level the playing field between state-owned enterprises and their private-sector counterparts. Similarly, in the area of digital trade, they are trying to guarantee the free flow of information and to enshrine intellectual property rights by obligating countries to strike a balance between copyright protections and fair use for reporting, research and scholarship.

Marantis said the partners are discussing a range of trade and environment issues, and that the United States has put forward a conservation proposal that seeks to address illegal trade in wildlife, logging and fisheries. He said it is something the country has never done in a trade agreement before.

The TPP trade ministers are scheduled to meet in September on the margins of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders Meeting in Vladivostok, Russia, to discuss next steps for the partnership as the latest round of negotiations begins in the United States.

The partnership was created in 2006 by Singapore, New Zealand and Chile, and has since grown to include Australia, Brunei, Malaysia, Peru, the United States and Vietnam. Mexico and Canada were nominated for membership in June, and are on track to join the partnership pending domestic consultation procedures by current members’ governments.

Reduced Costs for TB Testing Could Save Thousands of Lives

09 August 2012

Washington — Testing for tuberculosis is going to be faster, more accurate and more thorough in developing countries as a result of an announcement August 6 from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other partners.

This coalition of partners has reached an agreement that will slice the price of a new and highly accurate TB test called Xpert MTB/RIF, contained in a cartridge produced by the medical device manufacturer Cepheid. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended use of the product, but the single cartridge price of just under \$17 has been beyond the reach of many of the developing nations experiencing a high level of tuberculosis.

Technology first developed in the 1880s known as smear microscopy is still in use in many places. With a slide under a microscope, a medical technician can visually spot TB bacterium, but the method has limitations if a patient is co-infected with HIV, as many patients are in the developing world. Smear microscopy also doesn’t help clinicians detect the presence of drug-resistant strains of TB, also a growing threat in the developing world.

A significant time lag between test and diagnosis is another shortcoming of the old method, because samples must be transported from the field to a laboratory. Cepheid’s Xpert product can detect drug-resistant strains and the presence of HIV from a sample in less than two hours.

A press release from USAID suggests that the improvements offered by the new product may offer significant progress in the overall battle against TB. Delivery of test results more rapidly allows the patient to begin drug treatment sooner and avoid multiple trips to a clinic that could be a long, difficult journey from a rural village.

Research indicates that a broad introduction of this technology could allow for rapid diagnosis of 700,000 cases of TB disease and save health systems in low- and middle-income countries more than \$18 million in health costs.

The final partner to commit to the TB-testing cost reduction scheme is UNITAID, a global health initiative backed by Brazil, Chile, France, Norway and the United Kingdom.

TB is the leading cause of death among people living with HIV in Africa. In 2010, 8.8 million people fell ill with TB worldwide and 1.4 million died from the infectious disease.

More than 95 percent of TB deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, according to WHO, and it is among the top three causes of death for women aged 15 to 44.

Secretary Clinton Urges Post-Assad Syrian Transition Plan

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 07 August 2012

Washington — With Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad facing more high-level defections and a better coordinated opposition, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said it is time for Syrians and their supporters in the international community to plan for what will happen once the Assad regime falls.

Speaking in Pretoria, South Africa, August 7, Clinton said, "It is a very difficult time for the people of Syria who are caught in this terrible violence."

After 17 months of conflict, "we must figure out ways to hasten the day when the bloodshed ends and the political transition begins," she said.

"We have to make sure that the state's institutions stay intact. We have to make sure that we send very clear expectations about avoiding sectarian warfare. Those who are attempting to exploit the misery of the Syrian people, either by sending in proxies or sending in terrorist fighters, must recognize that that will not be tolerated, first and foremost by the Syrian people," Clinton said.

The secretary's remarks came a day after Syrian Prime Minister Riyad Hijab defected to Jordan, making him the highest-level official so far to leave the Assad regime. In an August 6 statement, Hijab denounced Assad's "terrorist regime" and said he was joining the Syrian opposition.

State Department spokesperson Patrick Ventrell told reporters August 6 that in recent days Colonel Yarub Shara, a senior Syrian intelligence officer, had defected to Jordan along with two government ministers and three brigadier generals. He also said Syria's first astronaut, Mohammad Ahmad Faris, had fled to Turkey and joined opposition forces there.

"These defections ... indicate that the regime is crumbling and losing its grip on power," Ventrell said. "We encourage others to join them in rejecting the horrific actions of the Assad regime and helping to chart a new path for Syria, one that is peaceful, democratic, inclusive

and just."

Ventrell said the Obama administration believes that "now is the time" for members of the Assad regime to "peel away ... [and] get off of the sinking ship."

Clinton said August 7 that the defections, as well as the intensity of the fighting around Aleppo, "really point out how imperative it is that we come together and work toward a good transition plan."

She said the Syrian opposition "is becoming increasingly coordinated and effective," and it reportedly holds territory from northern Aleppo to the Turkish border. It has also seized weapons from the Assad regime, including tanks.

Although U.S. officials cannot predict when Assad will fall, "it's going to happen," Clinton said, and the United States wants to support "a Syrian-led democratic transition that protects the rights of all Syrians," as well as the return of security and public safety to the country and ways to restart the Syrian economy.

Clinton said she plans to be in Istanbul August 11 for discussions with Turkish officials regarding those issues and humanitarian support for Syrian refugees.

Curiosity Rover Readies for Science on Mars

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 07 August 2012

Washington — A day and a half after a new rover vehicle landed on the surface of Mars, the excitement level remains high at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), the California-based agency managing the mission for NASA.

The surface team is preparing the rover Curiosity for the scientific work to come, checking equipment status and staking out the surrounding terrain. It is not yet the work of great discovery, but mission manager Mike Watkins said at an August 7 briefing in California that members of the surface team have been learning and practicing to operate Curiosity for years now.

"It's great to actually put our rover through the motions," Watkins said. "These are the days that people worked five and 10 years for, going on right now."

Watkins said his favorite images are always the first to be taken on a landing mission, because they give the ground crew the first inkling of "the neighborhood," as he calls it.

Curiosity's new neighborhood was carefully selected in early mission planning. Scientists named the spot Gale Crater, choosing it for touchdown because land contours in the area are thought to have been formed by surface water that once flowed on the now-dry planet.

JPL scientists have determined that the rover came down about 20 kilometers from the rim of the crater and about 12 kilometers from the base of Mount Sharp. The stratified layers of this mountain — about five kilometers high — are expected to reveal a lot about the planet's history, just as soil layers help Earth-bound geologists understand the history of our planet.

Other tasks Curiosity will perform in the days ahead include taking measurements of radiation levels and other environmental conditions on Mars. More than a dozen cameras are mounted at different points on the rover, and they'll all undergo operational tests and collect more imagery.

Ken Edgett is the principal investigator for one camera system mounted on a two-meter arm that will provide an array of vantage points.

"We can go straight up, we can go all the way down to the ground," Edgett said. "We can get within an inch of the rock or an inch of the soil and get an image about twice the resolution" of those taken by previous rovers.

Curiosity landed on Mars in the early hours of August 6 (August 5 in the Pacific time zone, where JPL is located) after an eight-month, 570-million-kilometer voyage. The craft descended to the Martian surface using a specially designed landing system that scientists are calling "a miracle of engineering."

Curiosity carries 10 science instruments that comprise an actual laboratory, the first ever landed on another planet, with far greater capabilities than the two rovers on the planet since 2004, Spirit and Opportunity. Later in the mission, Curiosity will use a drill and scoop at the end of its robotic arm to gather soil and rock samples for analysis of their composition and origins by its laboratory instruments.

Secretary Clinton Talks Agriculture, Health Care, Women's Rights in Africa

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 06 August 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is discussing health care, agriculture and women's empowerment as she continues her 10-day Africa tour in Uganda, Kenya and Malawi.

Clinton kicked off her trip July 31 in Senegal and stopped also in South Sudan before arriving in Kampala, Uganda, where she presented the State Department's 2011 Human Rights Defenders Award to a coalition of groups she praised as an "inspiration to the world" for working to defend human rights under difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances.

"You are tearing down barriers that prevent people from enjoying the full measure of liberty, the full experience of dignity, the full benefits of humanity," she said in presenting the award August 3. "This coalition shows what can happen when brave change-makers come together."

While in Uganda's capital city, Clinton also visited the Reach Out Mbuya Health Center, a clinic that does HIV/AIDS community outreach.

Thanks to the center's work, the secretary said, people in the area "have a place to come to be given support, to be given treatment, to be given dignity in order to achieve their own personal goals of being healthy and productive citizens."

Clinton called the clinic "a model not only for Uganda, but for all of Africa — indeed for the world" in remarks during a joint news conference with Ugandan Health Minister Dr. Christine Ondo. The two discussed the U.S.-Uganda partnership to improve health, including the 300,000 Ugandans receiving treatment for HIV/AIDS through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Since the program's start in Uganda, Clinton said, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS has dropped from nearly 20 percent to below 7 percent. But infections are once again on the rise.

"Uganda is now the only country in sub-Saharan Africa where the rate of HIV is going up," Clinton said. "Together we can work on making prevention the focus again and making sure that rate of infection goes down."

She said the United States has pledged an additional \$25 million to Uganda, and that U.S. government leaders are reviewing their strategy to combat the disease with their Ugandan counterparts. Clinton said the United States is also working with Uganda to combat the Ebola virus, and on maternal and child health issues.

While in Kampala, Clinton met with President Yoweri Museveni for talks on strengthening democratic institutions and protecting human rights, while also reinforcing Uganda as a key U.S. partner in promoting regional security.

Clinton traveled next to Nairobi, Kenya, where she met with President Mwai Kibaki, Prime Minister Raila Odinga and Chief Justice Willy Mutunga to discuss the importance of holding credible, transparent, free and fair national elections in 2013.

"The eyes of the world will be on this election," the secretary said at an August 4 press conference. "Kenya

has a chance to be a model for other nations, not just here in Africa but around the world."

She praised the country's recent referendum on a new constitution, and said the United States is committed to helping the country continue on its path to democracy.

Clinton next visited Lilongwe, Malawi, where she stopped by a Feed the Future event at the Lumbadzi Milk Bulking Group. She said for the decade that the United States has supported Malawi's dairy sector, the country's milk production has increased 500 percent and benefited thousands of farmers.

"Malawi and the United States are building on this success," she said. "I am pleased to announce that over the next three years, the United States intends to invest in Malawi more than \$46 million to strengthen the entire agricultural chain."

As gifts to the milk bulking group, the secretary presented a dairy bull named Emanuel and a liquid nitrogen network to help farmers in the region improve their dairy cattle breeding.

While in Malawi's capital, Clinton stopped by a joint PEPFAR-Peace Corps event at Camp GLOW.

An initiative of the Peace Corps, Camp GLOW – Girls Leading Our World – is an educational camp that teaches young women life skills that they can then share with their home villages.

"Every young woman can make a difference in her own life and in her community," Clinton said, adding that the United States believes strongly in the great human potential of all Malawians.

"Some countries may have oil or gold or diamonds, but the greatest treasures are the people of every country, which is why investing in the future of the children of a country is the best investment that we can make."

She said the United States is establishing an internship program at the Peace Corps for a few graduates of Camp GLOW, supporting nurse training for more than 2,400 Malawians between 2010 and 2015, and recruiting American doctors to help train health workers in Malawi.

"The United States really believes that the future of Malawi is bright," the secretary said.

Making the first trip to the country by a U.S. secretary of state, Clinton praised Malawi for standing up for democracy.

"You showed the world what kind of people you were,

and that sent a message everywhere," she said.

Clinton met earlier in the day with President Joyce Banda for talks on economic and political governance and reform.

The secretary next traveled to South Africa, where she is scheduled to visit democracy icon and former President Nelson Mandela and to participate in the U.S.-South Africa Strategic Dialogue before returning to Washington.

Newport News, Virginia: Using New Tools to Reduce Crime

By Lauren Monsen | Staff Writer | 06 August 2012

Washington – Like any metropolis, the city of Newport News, Virginia, has seen its share of drugs and violence – especially in troubled inner-city neighborhoods, where open-air drug markets typically emerge. But because new drug dealers quickly replace the ones arrested and incarcerated, the Newport News Police Department decided to try a different approach to fighting inner-city crime.

In November 2011, Newport News Police Chief James Fox announced that drug-market interventions would be launched in targeted neighborhoods.

"I had challenged our officers and the [police] leadership team to look at new ways to deal with the issues facing us," he recalled. "We could see that we were not going to arrest our way out of the problem, so why not use the drug-market intervention [program]?"

The idea, he said, was suggested by a young lieutenant in his Organized Crime Division. At the time, Fox's detectives were making undercover drug buys to build cases against suspected drug dealers.

Newport News police had adopted a framework of intelligence-led policing (sharing information and intelligence with other law enforcement agencies and the private sector to prevent crime), problem solving (identifying and analyzing crime-and-disorder patterns to develop effective responses) and community policing (a collaborative effort between police and citizens to identify crime-related problems and find solutions).

Adding the drug-market intervention (DMI) program to his agency's existing strategy made sense, according to Fox.

Under the DMI model, violent offenders are taken off the streets, while nonviolent dealers are offered a second chance.

Dealers are invited to a "call-in" meeting and informed

that they will not be arrested, but that nonattendance will have consequences. When dealers arrive, they are confronted by a roomful of police officers, social service providers, community leaders, and — perhaps most importantly — the dealers' own family members and neighbors.

Relatives and other local residents tell the dealers that they are valuable to the community, but that their dealing will not be tolerated. They are offered social services to help them turn their lives around, and advised by police that no formal sanctions will be pursued as long as the dealing stops. However, dealers are warned that there is enough evidence to prosecute them if they refuse to cooperate.

"Bottom line is that I'm willing to try anything that will help us reduce crime, and this program showed the community that we were not just about putting people in jail," Fox said.

Local residents, fed up with rising crime, have embraced the police department's DMI approach, Fox added.

"We have a great relationship with the community and all of the other organizations that were needed to make this program work," he said. "We got overwhelming support from the community and other city departments."

The program, which was developed by New York-based criminologist David Kennedy and first introduced in High Point, North Carolina, in 2003, has an impressive track record, curbing crime by as much as 40 percent to 50 percent in areas where it's been implemented. That progress has proved sustainable, which explains why the program is making inroads in a growing number of U.S. cities.

But there's another benefit to the DMI approach, according to Fox: "We work hard every day to build trust" with Newport News residents, "and I am convinced that this program helped to add to our trust account." Community engagement with the police, fostered by DMI efforts, reinforces the concept that everyone has a shared interest in keeping neighborhoods safe.

So far, the city's DMI program is showing good results, Fox said. "All the people in our program have recently been tested for drugs and were drug-free," he said. All of them are now gainfully employed too.

What makes the DMI strategy so successful? "It makes you focus on an area of your city and put forth all the resources needed to deal with the issues causing crime and disorder," Fox said.

"If it works and proves itself in one part of the city, then it can work in other areas," he added. The Newport News Police Department now plans to introduce the program in a second part of the city.

Task Force Stems Chemical Trafficking in Asia-Pacific

03 August 2012

This article was originally posted August 2 on the Department of Defense website.

Camp Smith, Hawaii — A little-known organization with U.S. Pacific Command is bringing together military and law-enforcement capabilities to combat drug-related transnational crime in the Asia-Pacific region that has a direct impact on U.S. security.

Joint Interagency Task Force West's major concern is precursor chemicals that are trafficked to the Western Hemisphere to produce methamphetamine, the task force director, Coast Guard Rear Admiral James E. Rendon, told American Forces Press Service.

These chemicals, frequently shipped from China, are sent to illegal laboratories in Mexico and Central America, where they are used to manufacture the highly addictive stimulant referred to on the street as "meth," "glass" or "tik."

Eighty percent of the methamphetamine that makes its way to the United States transits through Mexico, Rendon reported.

Illicit drugs have long represented a threat to the United States, where drug abuse takes a heavy personal toll on users and their loved ones. But society at large suffers too, not only from petty crimes committed by addicts to fund their habits, but also from even-more-insidious activities conducted by transnational crime rings bankrolled by the drug trade.

"There is a link, absolutely," Rendon said. "For transnational criminal organizations, there are no boundaries."

That gives them wide berth to gain power and influence that ultimately destabilizes governments and provides a funding source for extremism, he said. So, recognizing the link between drug trafficking, U.S. national security and regional stability, JIATF West is working hand in hand with its U.S. interagency and regional partners to confront this scourge.

By law, the Defense Department is barred from actively conducting law enforcement. But it contributes to those efforts largely by sharing intelligence about drug flows or

shipments of precursor chemicals, Rendon said.

"We have a very capable intelligence directorate, which has at its disposal all the tools ... to be looking for things that just don't look right in terms of shipments going across the Pacific," he said.

JIATF West passes this information to partner nations so their law enforcement entities can disrupt and seize shipments, typically after arriving at their destination ports, he said.

This collaboration is paying off, Rendon reported. Since 2010, JIATF West contributed to the seizure of about 1,500 metric tons of precursor chemicals used to produce methamphetamine. So far this fiscal year, he estimated that the task force has helped prevent production of up to 200 metric tons of methamphetamine.

To support this effort, an equally important part of JIATF West's mission is to help regional partners improve their domestic counternarcotics capabilities. "We meet with our partner nations, we assess what their needs are and then we do our best to support their needs," Rendon said.

Training packages, often delivered by Army Special Forces teams, range from tactical to classroom training tailored to an individual country's requirements, he said. Courses can cover anything from marksmanship to mission planning. More recently, U.S. FBI and Drug Enforcement Administration officials have begun providing fraudulent-document training to help partners follow the illicit money trail.

JIATF West also focuses heavily on the maritime domain and helping partner nations build capacity within their maritime police or coast guards. This runs the gamut, from deploying trainers to help nations close capability gaps to helping them develop the physical infrastructure and bases needed to project power within their sovereign waters.

Meanwhile, JIATF West also is supporting capacity-building through other base-development projects. Rendon recently returned from Indonesia and Thailand, where the task force, working through the U.S. embassies in those countries, established training centers where law enforcement officials can learn tracking and interdiction techniques and apply them in realistic training scenarios.

Rendon said he's been impressed that partner nations recognize the negative impact of trafficking on their own countries and are dedicated to doing their part to control it.

One of his goals, he said, is to partner with China — which has a huge chemical manufacturing base — to stem

the diversion of chemicals for illicit uses. Rendon plans to travel to China in September with R. Gil Kerlikowske, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, to address this challenge, along with other demand and supply-side issues.

"We are hopeful that China will want to engage with us," he said. "There is something in it for them just as much as there is something in it for us. And the bottom line is methamphetamine is just a horrible drug that has so many negative consequences related to the health, the safety and security of citizens of all countries."

As JIATF West and U.S. partners in the Asia-Pacific region experience success, Rendon recognizes that the traffickers continue to adapt their practices to avoid detection and interdiction. He compared it to the "balloon effect," in which pushing at one spot on a balloon causes it to bulge out on the other side, signifying a change of tactics.

"So we are constantly looking for ways to keep up with their tactics," he said.

The impact of these and other capacity-building efforts extends beyond the partners' own borders, Rendon said, contributing to regional stability.

"Everything that we do is in support of U.S. interests, but also in promoting regional stability and security within the Asia-Pacific region," he said. "The Asia-Pacific region has a drug problem itself. And so we work with various countries and train those various countries in a spectrum of topics to help their law enforcement be able to combat transnational organized crime."

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